

INFORMATION MEMORANDUM

DATE: April 7, 2004

TO: MEMBERS, STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

FROM: Sue Stickel, Deputy Superintendent
Instruction and Curriculum Branch

SUBJECT: Incorporating Alternative Schools Serving Very High-Risk Populations into California's Accountability System: Background Information

School year 2003-2004 marks the third year of implementation for the Alternative Schools Accountability Model (ASAM), mandated by the *Public Schools Accountability Act* (PSAA) Chapter 3, Statutes of 1999 [Article 2, Section 52052 (g)]. The ASAM is designed to provide accountability for alternative schools that serve very high-risk students, including continuation, community day, opportunity, county-operated court and community schools, and California Youth Authority (CYA) schools, as well as 'other alternative schools' that meet requirements set by the State Board of Education (State Board).

The purpose of the accompanying attachments is to provide the State Board with sufficient background to consider essential steps in the next phase of ASAM implementation. Activities to date have focused on developing multiple indicators tailored to the specific characteristics of the high-risk populations served by ASAM schools and on a system to collect these data. In the coming months the State Board will be asked to determine how the ASAM data should be evaluated to determine ASAM performance status and the role this status should play in overall accountability for these schools.

[Attachment 1:](#) Incorporating Alternative Schools Serving Very High-Risk Populations into California's Accountability System: Background Information (4 pages)

[Attachment 2:](#) Significant Features of California's Alternative Schools Accountability Model and Chronology of State Board Action Regarding the Model (3 pages)

[Attachment 3:](#) Listing and Brief Description of Alternative Schools Accountability Model (ASAM) Performance Indicators (4 pages)

Incorporating Alternative Schools Serving Very High-Risk Populations into California's Accountability System: Background Information

Background

School year 2003-2004 marks the third year of implementation for the Alternative Schools Accountability Model (ASAM), mandated by the *Public Schools Accountability Act* (PSAA) of 1999 Chapter 3, Statutes of 1999 [Article 2, Section 52052 (g)]. The ASAM is designed to provide accountability for alternative schools that serve very high-risk students, including continuation, community day, opportunity, county-operated court and community schools, and California Youth Authority (CYA) schools, as well as 'other alternative schools' that meet requirements set by the State Board of Education (State Board).¹ Students enrolled in ASAM schools are generally referred from traditional schools specifically for short-term interventions and tend to be highly mobile. (Attachment 2 summarizes significant features of the ASAM and State Board actions regarding the model.)

The ASAM provides accountability through a multiple-indicator system that includes several non-academic performance indicators designed to be especially appropriate for the mission of ASAM schools and their unique student populations. (The indicators are identified in Attachment 2.) Beginning in school year 2003-2004, ASAM schools may also report a pre-post assessment indicator based on a list of assessments approved by the State Board as measures of academic achievement.² The pre-post assessment instruments were chosen, in part, based on their sensitivity for measuring growth in achievement during the limited time periods many students attend ASAM schools. Results of the State Testing and Reporting (STAR) assessments summarized in the Academic Performance Index (API) provide a link to the overall state accountability

¹Schools that are designated as 'Other Alternative Schools' (e.g., alternative schools, charter schools) must meet new requirements approved by the State Board on June 11, 2003 to participate in the ASAM. Specifically, these schools must verify that they meet the following two conditions:

1. Their specific purpose is to serve, usually for less than a full academic year, high-risk students who are referred from other schools. High-risk students are defined as students who are or were:
 - expelled (*Education Code* 48925[b]) including situations in which enforcement of the expulsion order was suspended (*Education Code* 48917)
 - suspended (*Education Code* 48925[d]) more than 10 days in a school year
 - wards of the court (WIC 601 or 602) or dependents of the court (WIC 300 or 654)
 - pregnant and/or parenting
 - recovered dropouts (Dropout Guidelines for 2003 California Basic Educational Data System [CBEDS] at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/demographics/dropouts03.htm>)
 - habitually truant (*Education Code* 48262) or habitually insubordinate and disorderly (*Education Code* 48263), and whose attendance at the school is directed by a School Attendance Review Board (SARB) or probation officer (*Education Code* 48263)
 - retained more than once in kindergarten through grade 8
2. Seventy percent of their students meet these criteria.

² The State Board approved 15 indicators in spring 2001, putting three of the fifteen indicators on hold pending a rigorous review and approval process to identify appropriate pre-post assessment measures for local adoption as measures of Indicators 8, 9, and 10. This process was completed when the State Board approved eight pre-post assessment instruments for use as ASAM indicators of achievements. ASAM schools were not required to select and report on a third indicator until the full set of indicators became available for the 2003-2004 school year. The State Board approved the final Pre-Post Assessment Regulations for the Alternative Schools Accountability Model on September 10, 2003.

system.

Districts and county offices of education selected two non-academic performance indicators most appropriate for each of their ASAM schools in September 2001 and reported data on those indicators in July 2002 and June 2003. They selected a third indicator for each school in 2003-2004 and will report data for all three indicators at the end of the school year. Results of the first-year ASAM data collection for 1,096 schools were posted on DataQuest for local review. Second-year results will be posted in the coming months and will provide a baseline for establishing performance thresholds for the indicators.

ASAM and California's State Accountability System

Several years before the passage of the federal *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB), California legislated and began implementing a comprehensive reform program to improve accountability in the public school system. The PSAA established a new accountability system for California's public schools. While that system of measuring academic performance by establishing growth targets and a system of rewards and interventions is effective for most schools, there are certain situations—primarily involving small or highly mobile student populations and students referred from traditional schools specifically for interventions of a short duration—that require a supplemental approach to accountability. This circumstance reflects both the original intent and ongoing need for an alternative accountability system.

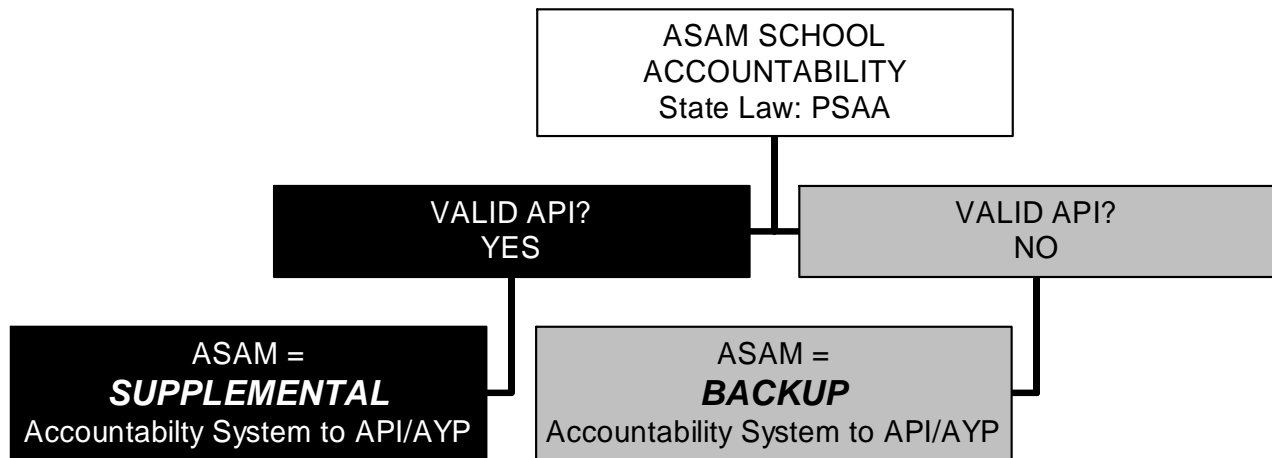
NCLB and PSAA, though differing in their emphasis on status as opposed to growth, define accountability systems that possess a significant degree of commonality in both philosophy and structure. With the advent of NCLB, California proposed using ASAM indicator data to determine Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for ASAM schools in the NCLB Accountability Workbook submitted in January 2003. The U.S. Department of Education did not accept this proposal and, as a consequence, AYP results are calculated for ASAM schools in the same way as for all other schools in California. Nevertheless, there are recognized justifications for maintaining and developing further the ASAM component of the state accountability system. They include:

- State law: The PSAA requires the development of an accountability system for alternative schools serving very high-risk students.
- School-level accountability: Although NCLB explicitly calls for school-level accountability, the majority of ASAM schools (approximately 60 percent in 2002-2003) do not have sufficient valid test scores to receive a valid API, one of the additional indicators required to make AYP under NCLB. Data for ASAM schools will be rolled up to determine whether the district or county made AYP, however those results will not provide a basis for commending or initiating essential interventions appropriate to the particular schools.
- Technical limitations: Very high mobility and other characteristics of the student populations served limit the validity of both the API and AYP models for most ASAM schools.

Role of ASAM Accountability Status

ASAM accountability status should be based on principles consistent with those of the federal and state accountability systems yet provide unique information. ASAM can and should play two key accountability roles. First, ASAM can serve as a *supplemental* system for monitoring different aspects of school performance than are found in the API and AYP, focusing on indicators specifically selected to align with the missions of alternative schools serving very high-risk students. Equally important, ASAM can serve a *backup* function, providing measures of school performance where there are not sufficient valid test results or data on other indicators to provide meaningful accountability. The figure below illustrates these two roles.

Accountability for California's Alternative Schools Serving Very High-Risk Populations



The following principles have driven the discussion of the potential role ASAM status should play in overall school accountability.

- First and foremost has been the desire to ensure that **all** schools are indeed held accountable for the achievement of their students. To the extent that ASAM schools “escape” direct and meaningful accountability under current PSAA (API) and NCLB (AYP) reporting rules, this principle would be violated. ASAM accountability status should continue to be used in conjunction with results of the overall state accountability system where these results are available.
- Equally important is the need for the proposed indicators of accountability to be reliable, valid, feasible, and fair for the affected students and schools. The State Board-approved ASAM accountability indicators are representative of performance that reflects success for the goals of alternative schools serving very high-risk students.

These principles can be implemented in several ways.

Questions to be Answered

This paper and the accompanying attachments are intended to provide to the State Board sufficient background to consider essential steps in the next phase of ASAM implementation. Activities to date have focused on developing multiple indicators tailored to the specific characteristics of the high-risk populations served by ASAM schools, and on a system to collect these data. The State Board must next determine how the ASAM data should be evaluated to determine ASAM performance status and the role this status should play in overall accountability for these schools. The members will be asked to consider the following questions in the coming months:

- What is the appropriate procedure for determining a school's status based on thresholds set for each ASAM performance indicator selected and on decision rules for combining the results for two or more performance indicators?
- What is the appropriate procedure for determining a school's status based on a pre-post assessment indicator?
- What is the appropriate procedure for determining a schools' overall ASAM accountability status based on decision rules for combining the status results from performance indicators and a pre-post assessment indicator?

Further Consideration by the State Board

Additional information will be presented to the State Board for information and action in May 2004 with the recommendation that the Board approve a model for resolving the first of these questions, determining a schools status based on thresholds set for each ASAM performance indicator selected, and on decision rules for combining the results for two or more performance indicators. Additional information on other details of the accountability models and the advantages and disadvantages of options for determining overall ASAM accountability status will be provided to the Board in June 2004 in anticipation of further discussion and future action. The goal is to finalize a system for determining ASAM school status on each individual indicator and on the set as a whole. As a result of this process, the ASAM will be able to provide timely, valid information on the current performance of schools serving very high-risk populations as well as identify goals for improvement.

Significant Features of California's Alternative Schools Accountability Model and Chronology of State Board Action Regarding the Model

Mandate

The *Public Schools Accountability Act* (PSAA) of 1999, SB 1X, Chapter 3, Statutes of 1999 [Article 2, Section 52052 (g)], required that by *... July 1, 2000 the Superintendent of Public Instruction, with the approval of the State Board of Education, shall develop an alternative accountability system for schools with fewer than 100 pupils, and **for schools under the jurisdiction of a county board of education or a county superintendent of schools, community day schools, and alternative schools, including continuation high schools and independent study schools.***

In July 2000, the State Board of Education (State Board) approved the framework for the Alternative Schools Accountability Model (ASAM). For purposes of the ASAM, *alternative schools* were defined as those that serve a *majority* of students who are (1) at high-risk for behavioral or educational failure, (2) expelled or under disciplinary sanction, (3) wards of the court, (4) pregnant and/or parenting, or (5) recovered dropouts. Students within these schools typically have a very short tenure in school and in educational programs, and schools serving them must meet the challenge of addressing a wide range of personal and social issues that interfere with their abilities to reach grade-level standards.

With State Board approval, separate accountability requirements were established for small schools (schools with fewer than 100 valid test scores) and those primarily serving students requiring special education services. These schools are not part of the ASAM.

Significant Features

The most significant feature of the ASAM has been development of school-level measures that include a variety of performance indicators in addition to the required State Testing and Reporting (STAR) assessments, both the norm-referenced and California Standards Tests. In July 2000, the State Board approved the ASAM as a multiple-indicator system based upon four critical features:

- accountability based on STAR results and on other indicators selected from a list approved by the State Board;
- schools selecting indicators appropriate to the populations they serve, with selections approved by local boards and submitted to the California Department of Education (CDE) for review and approval. Indicator selections are to remain in effect for a minimum of three years;
- school and student performance data collected by ASAM schools, reported to local boards, and submitted to the CDE at the end of each school year; and
- performance goals set for achievement on STAR results and on each of the state-approved indicators.

Schools Participating in the ASAM

Approximately 1,100 eligible alternative schools serving high-risk student populations registered to participate in the ASAM, selected performance indicators, and collected indicator data in school years 2001-2002 and 2002-2003. These schools enrolled approximately 200,000 students (on the date of the collection of enrollment information), but—because of high turnover in the course of a school year—they serve approximately 400,000 individual students. Data from the CDE's Educational Options Office, and the California Basic Education Data System (CBEDS), the Education Planning and Information Center (EPIC), and the Statewide Testing and Reporting (STAR) research files for charter schools have been combined to yield the estimated numbers in the following table.

ASAM School Type and Accountability Status for 2002-2003			
School Description	Alternative Schools Accountability Model 2002-2003¹	Main (API) Accountability System	Total (All Schools)
Continuation	508	21	529
Community Day	263	0	263
Alternative	139	110	249 ²
Juvenile Court	54	1	55
Charter ³	33	348	381
CA Youth Authority	16	0	16
County Community	52	11	63
Opportunity	23	2	25
CalSafe	3	2	5
Subtotal	1,091	495	1,586
Traditional Schools	0	7,300	7,300
Total (All Schools)	1,091	7,795	8,886

¹ Count includes ASAM schools. In a few cases, separate county-operated schools have the same County/District/School (CDS) code designation. The totals numbers in this table do not precisely match CBEDS counts for this reason.

² This number does not include a large number of alternative schools, estimated in the hundreds, that are schools of choice and have a distinctive curriculum or method of instruction, but that are not identified as alternative schools in any state database. Examples of such schools include some magnet schools, fundamental schools, special focus academies, and Middle College High Schools.

³ Some charter schools are accounted for in other categories. The total number of charter schools reflects schools in operation and submitting state test results in 2003.

State Board Actions Regarding the ASAM

July 2000	The State Board approved the alternative accountability system proposed in response to the PSAA mandate, including the framework for the Alternative Schools Accountability Model.
March 2001	The State Board approved 15 indicators for use in the ASAM. Three of the indicators were put on hold pending a rigorous review and approval process to identify appropriate pre-post assessment indicators of writing, reading, and math.
June 2002	The State Board approved extending the timeline for requiring ASAM schools to select and report on a third indicator until school year 2003-2004, pending approval of pre-post tests of achievement for use as indicators.
December 2002	The State Board approved four pre-post tests for use to collect data on ASAM pre-post assessment indicators of writing, reading, and math. The Board also received information on a model for setting performance thresholds for the ASAM performance indicators based on first-year data.
February 2003	The State Board approved four additional pre-post tests for use to collect data on ASAM pre-post assessment indicators of writing, reading, and math and received additional information on a model for setting performance thresholds for the ASAM performance indicators.
April 2003	The State Board approved <i>Guidelines for Administering, Scoring, and Reporting Locally Adopted Tests of Achievement for Use as Indicators in the Alternative Schools Accountability Model</i> .
June 2003	The State Board approved new, more stringent entry requirements for 'other alternative schools' ⁴ to participate in the ASAM.
June 2003	The State Board approved <i>Emergency Regulations for Administering, Scoring, and Reporting Locally Adopted Tests of Achievement for Use as Indicators in the Alternative Schools Accountability Model Pre-Post Assessments</i> .
September 2003	The State Board approved <i>Final Regulations for Administering, Scoring, and Reporting Locally Adopted Tests of Achievement for Use as Indicators in the Alternative Schools Accountability Model Pre-Post Assessments</i> .

⁴ The new entry requirements apply specifically to 'alternative schools' that are not defined in the *Education Code*, including charter schools.

Listing and Brief Description of Alternative Schools Accountability Model (ASAM) Performance Indicators

Indicators Approved by the State Board of Education in March 2001¹

		Purpose of Measurement	Indicator Use ²
STAR Tests (norm-referenced test and California Standards Tests)		Academic Achievement	Base
Group I: Readiness Indicators			
Indicators of Discipline Problems:			
1	Improved Student Behavior	Behavior and Pre-learning Readiness	Additional
2	Suspension	Behavior and Pre-learning Readiness	Additional
Indicators of Student Persistence			
3	Student Punctuality	On-time Attendance and Engagement	Additional
4	Sustained Daily Attendance	Holding Power and Student Persistence	Additional
5	Student Persistence	Holding Power and Student Persistence	Additional
Group II: Contextual Indicators			
6	Attendance	Attendance and Persistence	Additional
7	English Language Development (CELDT)	Growth in Language Skills	Additional
Group III: Academic and Completion Indicators			
Indicators of Achievement³		Available in 2003-2004	
8	Writing Achievement	Writing and Language Skills	Additional
9	Reading Achievement	Reading and Language Skills	Additional
10	Math Achievement	Math Skill Improvement	Additional
Indicators of Meeting Goals and School Completion			
11	Promotion to Next Grade	Grade Completion and Academic Progress	Additional
12	Course Completion	Course Completion and Performance	Additional
13	Credit Completion	Credit Completion and Academic Progress	Additional
14	High School Graduation	Credit and Program Completion	Additional
15	GED Completion, CHSPE Certification, or GED Section Completion	Program Completion	Additional

¹ The PSAA Subcommittee on Alternative Accountability recognized that the indicators proposed above have differing levels of reliability. In general, those in Groups II and III are more likely to be able to meet the standard required as a basis for potential rewards and interventions. Readiness indicators (Group I) are essential for assessment of school performance in assisting students to overcome social, attitudinal, and behavioral problems that limit their ability to attend and learn in a school setting. A critical task of the Subcommittee and the California Department of Education (CDE) is the ongoing evaluation of the Alternative Schools Accountability Model (ASAM) during its first three years of operation, including analyses of the stability, reliability, and validity of the indicators. During that period, data on indicators submitted by schools will be analyzed and results reported to the State Board of Education (State Board) as part of its consideration of possible revision and expansion of the ASAM.

² The Subcommittee defined two general classes of indicators. A "Base" indicator consists of information to be reported by all schools. "Additional" indicators are those selected locally from the State Board-approved list. Schools report base indicator information (STAR norm-referenced test and California Standards Test results) through the test publisher. Schools report information on their additional performance indicators directly to CDE through the ASAM Online Reporting System.

³ The achievement indicators were approved in principle in March 2001 pending a rigorous review process to identify assessment instruments that align to state content standards and to meet required technical criteria. The State Board approved eight instruments for use as locally adopted indicators of achievement in winter 2003 following completion of the review process.

Brief Description of the ASAM Indicators⁴

Indicator 1: Improved Student Behavior

This indicator provides a measure of school performance in changing and improving students' behavior and readiness to learn. It requires schools to collect and report information on the number of long-term⁵ students cited and the number of citations for inappropriate behavior and recommended for suspension or expulsion for offenses under California's *Education Code* Section 48900(i), committing obscene acts or engaging in habitual profanity or vulgarity, and Section 48900(k), disrupting school activities or willfully defying the authority of school personnel.

Indicator 2: Suspension

This indicator provides a measure of school performance in changing and improving students' behavior and readiness to learn. Schools report the number of long-term students who received out-of-school suspensions and their total number of out-of-school suspensions during the reporting year.

Indicator 3: Student Punctuality

This indicator provides a measure of school performance in changing and improving on-time student attendance and engagement in classroom-based programs. Schools report long-term students as present on time if they were in class at the beginning of the first daily period indicated on their assignment schedule.

Indicator 4: Sustained Daily Attendance

This indicator provides a measure of school performance in changing and improving school holding power and persistence for long-term students receiving classroom-based instruction. Schools count students as completing an entire assigned instructional day when they were present in class during the first and last daily period indicated on their assignment schedule.

Indicator 5: Student Persistence

This indicator provides a measure of school performance in changing and improving school holding power and persistence for long-term students. A school's persistence rate is the percentage of long-term students enrolled in the school during the reporting year who did not drop out of school as determined by the standard dropout definition used by the CDE.

Indicator 6: Attendance

This indicator provides a measure of school performance in changing and improving student attendance and persistence for long-term students. For students receiving classroom-based instruction, schools report students as attending if average daily

⁴ Full descriptions and operational definitions of the indicators as well as sample report forms are provided in the annual *ASAM Reporting Guide*.

⁵ Long-term refers to students who have been enrolled in an ASAM school for 90 continuous school days during the reporting year.

attendance (a.d.a.) is claimed for their attendance for any portion of an instructional day. For students receiving instruction in the independent study mode, schools report students as attending if a.d.a. is claimed for their attendance.

Indicator 7: English Language Development (CELDT)

This indicator, which provided a measure of school performance in improving reading and English language skills, is no longer in use.

Indicator 8: Writing Achievement

This indicator provides a measure of writing achievement based on administration of a pre-post assessment instrument⁶ to the long-term students enrolled in the school during the reporting year.

Indicator 9: Reading Achievement

This indicator provides a measure of reading achievement based on administration of a pre-post assessment instrument⁶ to the long-term students enrolled in the school during the reporting year.

Indicator 10: Math Achievement

This indicator provides a measure of math achievement based on administration of a pre-post assessment instrument⁶ to the long-term students enrolled in the school during the reporting year.

Indicator 11: Promotion to Next Grade

This indicator provides a measure of school performance emphasizing strategies for improving grade completion and academic progress in the elementary school grades (K-6). Schools report the percentage of long-term students in the elementary grades who are promoted to the next grade level during or at the end of the reporting year.

Indicator 12: Course Completion

This indicator provides measures of school performance emphasizing strategies for improving course completion and academic progress in the middle school grades (6-8).

- **Course Completion**
Schools report the percentage of courses attempted and passed by long-term students during the reporting year.
- **Average Course Completion**
Schools report the average number of courses completed by long-term students during the reporting year.

⁶ All pre-post assessments are selected from a list of instruments approved by the State Board for this use.

Indicator 13: Credit Completion

This indicator provides measures of school performance emphasizing strategies for improving credit completion and academic progress in the high school grades (9-12). Schools report credits that count toward graduation requirements and are awarded for successful completion of course and/or unit requirements.

- **Credit Completion**
Schools report the percentage of high school graduation credits that long-term students attempted and successfully completed during the reporting year.
- **Average Credits Completed**
Schools report the average number of high school graduation credits successfully completed by long-term students during the reporting year.

Indicator 14: High School Graduation

This indicator provides a measure of school performance in improving credit completion and graduation rate.

- **Graduation Rate for Credit-Eligible Students**
Schools report the percentage of credit-eligible long-term high school students who received a high school diploma during the reporting year.
- **On-time High School Graduation Rate**
Schools also report the percentage of long-term grade 12 students who actually graduated during the reporting year based upon the date initially established at high-school entrance for their graduation.

Indicator 15: General Education Development Completion

This indicator provides a measure of school performance in improving program completion by students eligible to take the General Education Development (GED) test.

- **GED Completion**
Schools report the percentage of eligible long-term students who took all the tests required for GED certification and successfully passed them during the reporting year.
- **GED Section Completion**
Schools report the percentage of GED sections attempted and successfully passed by eligible long-term students during the reporting year.